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Elm Hill Farm

A MORGAN LEGACY, AN AMERICAN FABLE

While it is a well-known and historic Morgan prefix, the estate—with horses, cattle, orchards, and hardwood—and its people comprise a magical thread in the American tapestry.

By Helen Herold

Elm Hill Farm was originally a parcel of land granted by King George III of England to the ancestors of Dr. Blanchard W. Means almost 250 years ago. The original family, the Blanchards, were a “hardy, Puritanical group who developed such diversified interests as to produce bankers, ministers, educators, and missionaries. They were world travelers, but primarily lovers of the land,” wrote Louise Chandler Means in 1982. For most of the 20th century the farm was known for its highly prized Jersey cattle and Morgan horses and was one of the

largest working farms in Central Massachusetts. Eventually the cattle operation expanded to include Holsteins. The estate also supported fruit orchards and managed stands of hardwood trees.

The Elm Hill Farm property is located in an area of Central Massachusetts, which was originally known as the Quaboag Plantation, founded in 1660, that now makes up parts of the town of Warren and New Braintree and the whole towns of Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, and West Brookfield. Fourteen pioneer families settled this area that was then a wilderness. In 1673

ABOVE: Dr. Blanchard and Louise Means looking very Gatsby-esque. **INSETS:** The road sign that marks the property; the “summer mansion;” the more recent sign designating the property a national historic site; one of three recently renovated barns at Elm Hill Farm; Elsie the Borden “spokes-cow.”



TOP LEFT: Elm Hill High Hat as a young horse with Don Fairbrother. **BOTTOM:** High Hat again, photographed barefoot and in his 20s by Dodo Knight; **TOP RIGHT:** Elm Hill Star Leader (Photo © Fred J. Sass). The two full brothers occupied an important place in the breeding program.

the Plantation was broken up as these towns became incorporated. The Blanchard Means family archives tell us that Amasa Blanchard's parents moved to Brookfield from Sturbridge in 1773 and were the first of seven generations to live on this property. Amasa began to acquire additional property just before his marriage in 1797. He was a cabinet and chair maker and his workshop, built in 1800, still stands in its original location next door to the Victorian mansion which has been the showplace of the farm since it was built in 1870. The workshop's original sign and his financial records, as well as sections of the family's archives, are housed as part of the collections at Old Sturbridge Village. Amasa lived at Elm Hill until his death at 86.

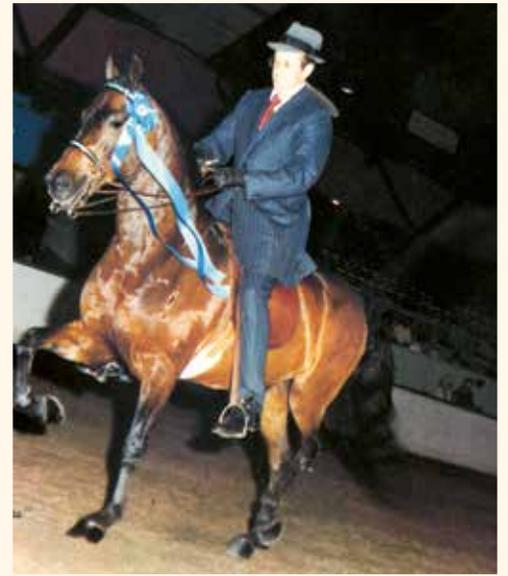
Amasa's third son, Albert Cheney Blanchard (1808-1874) had moved West to Richmond, Indiana, where he prospered, buying riverfront property and opening several mills and businesses. Albert returned to Elm Hill as a wealthy businessman and, in 1870, built the Victorian mansion house that has been the centerpiece of the eight homes (the assemblage of buildings included a second

mansion, the winter home for the family, along with separate homes for employees of the farm such as the resident trainer, the herdsman and one for nephew John Means Spencer) that were part of the farm until recent years. Albert's two sons, Charles (a minister and a horse lover) and Albert Henry, as well as his granddaughter Abby, continued to live at Elm Hill and to care for the 1,300 acre

farm that had now been in the family for several generations. Morgan horses had been a part of life at Elm Hill since the early 19th century and had been used for carriage driving and farm work. Abby became a skilled horsewoman, and later as, Mrs. Oliver William Means, shared her love of horses with her three children, Frances, Blanchard, and Oliver.

The tradition of breeding and showing prizewinning livestock began at Elm Hill Farm during a trans-Atlantic voyage when Reverend Oliver Means and his wife, Abby, met a gentleman from the Isle of Jersey and became interested in Jersey cattle.

The farm's extensive acreage was positioned between three of the four Brookfields, and was characterized by meadows and pastures, woodland areas, and stony hills which provided rocks for the stone walls found all over the property. A variety of crops were raised, including a commercially producing apple orchard, and a large dairy herd existed for 60 or so years. Impressive elm



LEFT: Elm Hill Baypather with John McDonald (Photo © Freudy) and, **RIGHT,** he was a special horse for the Means' nephew John Means Spencer.

trees lined the road leading through the farm. Beautiful decorative gardens were nurtured and maintained with daily garden diaries having been kept for more than 60 years by Louise Means and her mother-in-law Abby Oliver Means. Copies of some of those diaries are still in the library of the main house. I recall carpets of yellow and ivory daffodils blooming absolutely everywhere in the spring, with lawns remaining unmowed until their symphony of color began to subside.

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(His impressive mounted head still hangs on the wall in the area of the broodmare barn where carriages have been stored for decades.) Through the 1930s the Elm Hill Jersey herd took top awards across the country and in Canada. The most famous of them all was a golden beauty with big brown eyes and long eyelashes named You'll Do Lobelia. At the 1939 World's Fair in New York, she was selected by the Borden Company to be their "Elsie, the Borden Cow" advertising icon and even went on to star in the Hollywood movie "Little Men"! At the time, it was claimed that she was more recognized than Albert Einstein. Elsie traveled the country for the Borden Company and became one of the best-known advertising

symbols of the 20th century. Elm Hill Farm became even more famous in the bovine world.

Fast forward, for a moment, to the 1990s, when the farm's ownership and land usage status changed drastically. Dr. Means had died in 1973, and Mrs. Means lived until 2009. They were parents to a developmentally disabled daughter, Weesie, who still lives in a home built for her on the farm. The Elm Hill Farm Historic District was created in 1991 when the property was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1996 a large tract of

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Elm Hill land, approximately 1,000 acres, was donated to the Massachusetts Audubon Society as conservation land with an "agricultural use" classification and serving as a wildlife sanctuary. Several of the individual homes along East Main Street were sold off as separate parcels, leaving a 35-acre piece intact that

included the mansion built in 1870, Amasa's original home and workshop from the early 1800s, the horse and cattle barns, a large home near the barns, the riding ring, and some pasture area. Mrs. Means created the Blanchard W. Means Foundation in 1998. The developmental programs held at the farm had been managed by Hope Homes for the Foundation until early 2009 when the Foundation became affiliated with Rehabilitative Resources. The Elm Hill Center was created to offer care for people with development disabilities and to give autistic children the opportunity to interact with animals. By 2013, Rehabilitative Resources realized that they did not have the financial resources or the knowledge needed to



LEFT: Elm Hill Baystater was used heavily at stud in the late years at Elm Hill (Photo © Dodo Knight); **RIGHT:** Windcrest Madonna winning with her produce at "The National." The horse at the end of the line is Elm Hill Baystater as a weanling.

operate this complicated farming operation and the remaining intact acreage of Elm Hill Farm was offered for sale to the public for the first time in two and a half centuries.

William McCreary became the new owner of Elm Hill Farm in Spring 2014. Like the original Blanchard family members, he also moved from the Sturbridge, Massachusetts area to the Brookfield property to take a new direction in life. He claims to be a "wannabe-farmer," and already has experience with horses. He was unaware of the extensive Elm Hill history at the time of purchase, and has since reshaped his plans for the farm to include more public access. He has plans to make the 1870 mansion available

for meetings, celebrations, weddings, and parties and the horse barns are again full of boarders and riders. Bill has also leased an additional 60 acres of the Audubon Society conservation land to be used as farmland. I have

recently met him while preparing this article and have very much enjoyed sharing many photos with him of the beautiful Elm Hill Morgan horses that were born and raised on the property.

A resurgence of interest in Morgan horses characterized the time immediately following the Second World War. Open competitions at expositions and fairs were the showcases for horse fanciers. Morgans and Saddlebreds competed against each other. The National Morgan Horse Show, the first all-Morgan horse show that began in 1939 in South Woodstock, Vermont, resumed in 1947 and was hosted again by Ted Davis at his Windcrest Farm in Windsor, Vermont. From its inception, this Morgan horse showcase had been supported by several serious Morgan breeding

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farms and, by the late '40s, the list of participating farms had grown. The breeding of Morgans in New England at this time, and for several decades into the future, was concentrated within a group of dedicated breeding farms that were responsible for producing many generations of wonderful horses. A great rivalry developed between two natural show horses that went on to be great sires. Upwey Ben Don (b. 1941 Upwey King Ben x Quietude) and Orland Leader (b. 1944 Ulendon x Vigilda Burkland) were both exciting horses to watch, and went head to head on many occasions early in their careers. Their owners, Ted Davis and Steve Tompkins, were also great friends. It is safe to assume that Dr. and

Mrs. Means, and their nephew John Spencer, were greatly impressed by some of these performances.

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There is no doubt that Elm Hill Farm purchased an exceptional group of mares as the foundation of their breeding program, and selectively retained mares that were produced there. By the 1950s, the late Dr. Blanchard Means had begun to show Morgans with the help of his nephew John Means Spencer and his young resident trainer William Brooks. The next ten years showed a significant expansion of the breeding program and the interest in showing his Elm Hill Morgans. The enduring goal at Elm Hill was to breed for overall quality and ability rather than for extremes. Dr. Means made a visit to Ted Davis's Windcrest Farm to purchase the beautiful Ben

Don daughter, Windcrest Star Of Dawn (b. 1949 Upwey Ben Don x Dream Star), which began the acquisition of several Ben Don daughters and an enduring friendship between the two families.

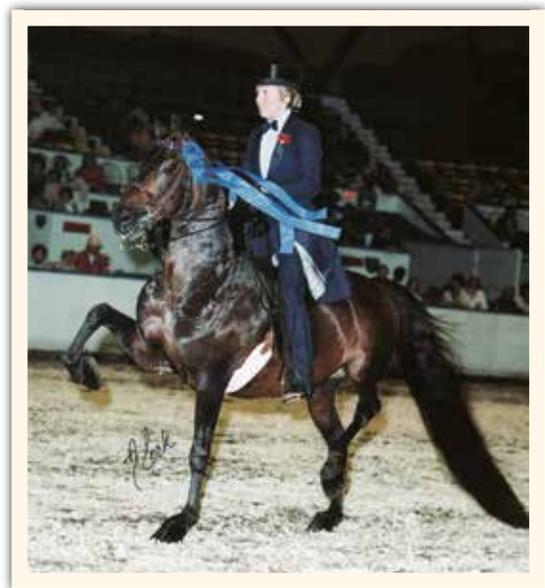
Windcrest Star Of Dawn produced six foals for Elm Hill. She was bred four times to Orland Leader, once to Sealect Of Windcrest, and once to Gladgay's Pride. Three of the Orland Leader crosses produced stallions that would have a significant impact. Elm Hill Star Leader (b. 1961) and Elm Hill High Hat (b. 1962) were retained by Elm Hill and spent their entire lives there. A third son, Elm Hill Star Don (b. 1966) was sold in 1972. These three sons had a total of 104 get. Star Of Dawn was a two-time winner of the Dam and Produce class at The National in Northampton in 1963 and 1965.

The next Ben Don daughter purchased was Wind-Crest Maytime (b. 1953) who was out of the great mare Seneca Sweetheart, a full sister to Pecos, who would also be featured prominently in the Elm Hill program. Maytime produced seven foals, which included April Of Elm Hill (b. 1958) by Whippoorwill Duke who stayed at Elm Hill as a broodmare, Elm Hill Baypather (b. 1965) by Star Leader who became John Spencer's show horse, and Elm Hill's May Queen (b. 1967), also by Star Leader, who had successful show career.

Windcrest Madonna (b. 1955 Upwey Ben Don x Ingrid) was considered the "Grande Dame" of Elm Hill. Madonna was a result of the Golden Cross that produced Windcrest Mr. Success, Windcrest Donald, Donlyn Of Windcrest, and the great mare Windcrest Dona Lee. This exquisite mare competed successfully in harness with Dr. Means, and as part of a driving pair with Maytime. Madonna produced five foals, three by Pecos—Elm Hill Temptress (b. 1963), Elm Hill Enchantress (b. 1965), and Elm Hill Powhattan (b. 1967), and two foals by Star Leader—Elm Hill Dusky Donna (b. 1968) and Elm Hill Baystater (b. 1973). All but Dusky Donna lived out their lives at Elm Hill. Madonna was also a two time Dam and Produce winner for Elm Hill at The National in 1966 and 1973.

A fourth Ben Don daughter, Windcrest Jillian (b. 1957) was sold to the Lyons in Michigan in 1970 but produced the wonderful Elm Hill Bay Leader, by Star Leader, in 1969. Bay Leader was eventually owned by Heidi Kunkel, who rode and drove him to multiple championships in amateur park saddle and amateur park harness. In his lifetime Bay Leader sired 25 foals.

Pecos was, "One of the primary influences on the Morgan breed in the last half of the twentieth century. He was undeniably Morgan in his every characteristic. He was not a large horse. He thought like a big horse, was always proud of himself and displayed vigor and vitality that bespoke an inner energy and fire. Still he was a mannered stallion and noted for siring horses of good dispositions," wrote W. Dayton Sumner in *The Morgan Horse* in 1980. Pecos was sired by Cornwallis and out of Hepatica. His first foal was a brown son out of Janee, a Jubilee King mare, who came to be known as Sealect Of Windcrest, after being purchased as a four-year-old by Ted Davis for Windcrest Farm. Mr. Davis planned to cross him with his Ben Don daughters which proved to be very wise, as some of the best foals by Pecos and Sealect Of Windcrest were gotten from Ben Don daughters.



TOP TO BOTTOM: Applevale Starlet probably with her 1985 foal Elm Hill Fancilea by Baystater (Photo © Dodo Knight); Elm Hill High Hope, owned at the time by Rapidan River Farm, being driven by Judy Whitney (Photo © Mike Finton); and Elm Hill Bay Leader with the late Heidi Kunkel (Photo © A. Cook).



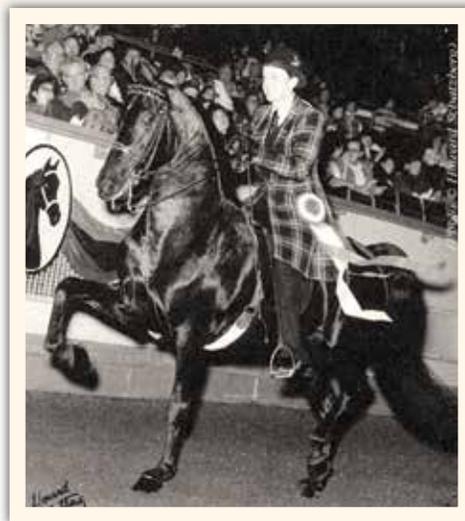
TOP TO BOTTOM: Elm Hill Charter Oak; Elm Hill Juliette with Lisa Howa; and Elm Hill Maria with John McDonald (Photo © Freudy).

Dr. and Mrs. Means must have agreed with the assessment of Mr. Davis about Pecos and committed early on to the bloodline through the purchase of Wind-Crest Maytime, the Seneca Sweetheart (full sister to Pecos) daughter. Elm Hill purchased three Pecos daughters: Ledgewood Cora Jane (b. 1955), a full sister to Sealect Of Windcrest, who produced Elm Hill Surprise (b. 1967), the beautiful show mare Elm Hill Snowflake (b. 1970 by Star Leader), and Elm Hill Metacomet (b. 1972 by Star Leader); Applevale Maybe (b. 1961 out of UVM Nevis) who was sold to Rapidan River Farm in 1971 with her foal by High Hat, Elm Hill High Hope; and Applevale Starlet (b. 1961) who was owned by John Spencer, and produced the very talented Cara Lee (b. 1973 by Star Leader), and Elm Hill Statelea (b. 1979, by Baystater). The farm had also purchased Honey Brook (b. 1960) by Sealect Of Windcrest, who was sold to William Brown Maloney in 1969 while bred to Star Leader, and produced Figure's Lorelei that year.

Elm Hill broodmares were bred several times to Pecos with wonderful results. Windcrest Madonna produced three foals by Pecos. The first was Elm Hill Temptress (b. 1963) and the second was her sister by Pecos, Elm Hill Enchantress (b. 1965). These two beautifully feminine mares were hard to tell apart and were favorites of Dr. and Mrs. Means. They were often driven as a pair. Temptress produced five foals, and Enchantress three, including the lovely Elm Hill Juliette owned and shown by Lisa Howa. Elm Hill Powhattan (b. 1967) was the third full sibling, also retained by the farm, and went on to sire 16 foals, seven with the Elm Hill prefix. Bar T Coreder (b. 1956 Orcland Leader x Corine) was never shown but was bred twice to Pecos. She produced Elm Hill Coralinda in 1964, who had an impressive junior career in the park harness division and went on to have two foals by Star Leader (Elm Hill Irish Leader in 1970 and Elm Hill Coriolanus in 1971) and in 1969 foaled the incredibly talented park mare Elm Hill Maria, by High Hat. Her second foal by Pecos was the fine stallion Elm Hill Charter Oak (b. 1967) who was purchased as a nine-year-old by Jeanne Mellin Herrick. Charter Oak made many memorable performances in the park saddle division and went on to sire 156 foals.

The exciting Elm Hill Baystater (b. 1973 Star Leader x Windcrest Madonna) had an exceptional show career with John McDonald and became the last herd sire at Elm Hill. He sired seventeen foals, nine with the Elm Hill Prefix. The two most well known were Elm Hill Bay Pilgrim (b. 1981) out of Oldwick Hatfield, and Elm Hill Ben Star (b. 1988) out of B-L Enchanted Ella. Ben Star was purchased by the Packard sisters and was impressively shown by Ann Anderson, and later became Lisa Howa's second Elm Hill bred show horse (and was shown with great success by her two sons, as well).

Elm Hill Farm had three resident trainers over the almost four decades of showing the farm's stock at Northeast competitions. William Brooks was the first to assist, arriving in the mid 1950s. His talented park harness and in hand presentations began to put Elm Hill in the winners circle at prestigious events. When Bill left Elm Hill, he and his wife Betty went on to open Brookherst Stable in Whately, Massachusetts where he worked with assistant Wayne Willnaeur for many years. Next up was Don Fair-



LEFT TO RIGHT: Elm Hill Bay Pilgrim (Photo © B. Hipsley); Elm Hill Ben Star and Ann Anderson (Photo © Howard Schatzberg).

brother for a short stay. Don moved on to Dr. and Mrs. Ruder's Whirlwind farm. The early 1970s brought John McDonald to Elm Hill from Saranac Lake, New York following college and blacksmith school. John and his father, Tom, had some nice Morgans who had been shown in the upstate New York area. Ray Lucia, the horseman and breeding manager at Elm Hill, had encouraged John to make the move to Massachusetts to fill the open trainer's position in Brookfield. John, in his first professional position, had the opportunity to work with some of the finest Morgan stock in the Northeast—such as Elm Hill Maria, Elm Hill Powhattan, Elm Hill Snowflake, Cara Lee, and Elm

Hill Baystater, and he did not disappoint. By the early '70s an excellent team was in place at Elm Hill. Dr. Stewart Harvey was the vet and supervised the breeding activities. Tim Keller became the farm's blacksmith in the late '60s. Elm Hill was Tim's very first farm account and he continued working there for many years. Ray Lucia remained in his position until the 1980s, when he lost his fight with a fatal illness. While at Elm Hill, John began to work with outside horses and clients until his eventual move to his own operation in Southern Massachusetts. He spent many years training Morgans in

Colorado, became a highly respected Morgan judge, and recently returned to the Adirondacks in northern New York State.

The Means were lovers of music, who entertained guests at Great-Gatsby-like parties, who maintained multiple homes, who had famous friends like Serge Rachmaninoff, but who also appreciated and nurtured the beauty and potential of each Morgan horse born there. I believe that Louise Chandler Means is an unsung hero of this story. She was a philanthropist, a preserver of nature, and an advocate for the rights of the disabled. She continued her husband's passion for breeding and exhibiting the Elm Hill

The Elm Hill Farm story is a tale of a bygone era. That of a country estate owned by a well-to-do family dating back to pre-revolutionary times, who made the commitment to own, breed, and exhibit some of the finest Morgan horses available anywhere.

Morgan horses after his death when it was not easy for her to do so. She took on the responsibility of setting aside the Elm Hill property in the 1990s as a Historic Farm District and a wildlife sanctuary. She was very refined, but also tough as nails—characteristics shared with Windcrest Madonna, one of her favorite mares.

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